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ABSTRACT

The Cooperative Extension Service is a bureaucracy with formal lines of communications flowing from the state director through district extension agents to area and county staffs. In view of the importance of professional reading material to the district agent, it is important to know the kinds of materials he needs and to what extent present periodicals are meeting this need. The study specifically sought answers to the following questions: (1) number and type of publications read, (2) time spent reading professional materials, (3) reasons for reading, (4) the extent to which each publication is read, (5) the purpose for reading a particular publication, (6) the use made of the material contained in a particular publication, and (7) a comparison of a particular publication to other selected publications. Information was obtained in personal interviews of 17 supervisors using a preprinted interview schedule. The results indicate that the typical supervisor receives approximately seven professional and four popular publications each month and that he spends approximately nine hours per week reading beyond the daily newspaper and reads principally for professional improvement. (CK)

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A Study of the Reading Habits of the

Members of the N. C. Agricultural Extension Service

PART I -- DISTRICT SUPERVISORS

January, 1969

AC010 482

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Members of the N. C. Agricultural Extension Service*

PART I -- DISTRICT SUPERVISORS

Purpose of the Study

The Cooperative Extension Service is a bureaucracy with formal lines of communications flowing from the state director through district extension agents to area and county staffs. Since Extension is charged with the dissemination of information and the volume is increasing at such a rapid rate, increased demands are being placed on all staff members to keep abreast of these developments. This is especially true of the district agents because of their role in the hierarchy of the organization. They are responsible for the administration of policy, goals, and programs; and it is necessary that they stay well-informed in order to provide the leadership expected of them.

Keeping up with new developments can be done in many ways. The district agent may enroll in special classes, join discussion groups, belong to educational organizations, and attend conferences

*This part of the study was conducted by Robert C. Hubbard, Jr., graduate student in the Dept. of Adult Education, under the direction of W. L. Carpenter, Assoc. Prof. of Adult Education, and J. D. George, Ext. Prof. of Sociology and Anthropology.

and lectures. He will no doubt also rely heavily upon individual study based on reading worthwhile books, periodicals, newsletters, etc. Actually, all of the activities mentioned involve reading on the part of the supervisor if he is to be in a position to participate effectively.

In view of the importance of professional reading material to the district agent, it is important to know the kinds of materials he needs, and to what extent present periodicals are meeting this need. The study specifically sought answers to the following questions:

1. Number and type of publications read.
2. Time spent reading professional materials.
3. Reasons for reading.
4. The extent to which each publication is read.
5. The purpose for reading a particular publication.
6. The use made of the material contained in a particular publication.
7. A comparison of a particular publication to other selected publications.

Research Procedure

There are nine men and eight women district supervisors serving on the staff of the N. C. Agricultural Extension Service. Three of the supervisors have headquarters in Greensboro and the remaining 12 are housed in Ricks Hall on the N. C. State University campus.

Information was obtained in personal interviews using a pre-printed interview schedule. The schedule was pretested on several former extension employees now engaged in graduate study.

All but two of the 17 supervisors were available for interviewing. One was on leave serving as a visiting professor in an adjoining state and the other was on study leave attending a university in another city.

Prior to setting up interviews, the project coordinator wrote each of the supervisors explaining the nature of the study and introducing the interviewer.

Following this letter, the interviewer contacted the offices of the district supervisors and arranged a schedule for the interviews. The interviews were conducted during the week of December 9, 1968.

Results of the interviews were coded, tabulated, and punched on computer data cards; and independent and dependent variables were identified. The data was computer-analyzed by the TSAR program which gave frequency count and percentage distribution by the two independent variables--sex and years of service as a supervisor--tc the reading habits and evaluation of selected publications. The remainder of the selected professional publications were cross sorted by the computer with a mean and standard deviation score established.

Analysis of Findings

The typical supervisor with the North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service has a median of 10 years service as a district supervisor; however, the range is from 2 years to 25 years. All but one of the supervisors had served as a county worker with the mode of 12 years service best describing the typical supervisor as 5 of the 15 had 12 years experience as a county worker. The range of county experience was from 0 to 17 years.

In terms of the total work experience, 33 per cent of the district supervisors had 1 to 12 years experience, 20 per cent had 13 to 25 years experience, and 47 per cent had 26 to 39 years experience.

Nine of the district supervisors had a B.S. + degree; two, an M. S. + degree; and one, a doctorate.

Number of Publications Received

The typical supervisor receives by subscription or gratis approximately seven professional publications and four popular publications each month. The number of popular publications for the staff ranges from two to nine and professional publications ranges from five to nine.

Amount of Time Spent in Reading

Sixty per cent of the supervisors, as shown in Figure 1, estimate that with the exception of the daily newspaper they spend from 1 to 6 hours per week reading and 40 per cent estimate they spend from 7 to 25 hours per week reading.

Reasons for Reading

When asked what best described their reason for reading, two-thirds said they read for professional improvement and one-third said they read for intellectual curiosity. There were none who reported reading merely for relaxation; however, many said that much of the time spent in reading actually resulted in periods of relaxation because of the interest in the information and the change of pace it provided.

Periodical Preferences

Three periodicals were received and read by 12 or more of the 15 respondents: Journal of Cooperative Extension, Extension Service Review, and National 4-H Club News. A detailed analysis of reading habits, reasons for reading, and the usefulness of these three publications is given in some detail, including comparisons by tenure and sex, in tables 1, 2 and 3.

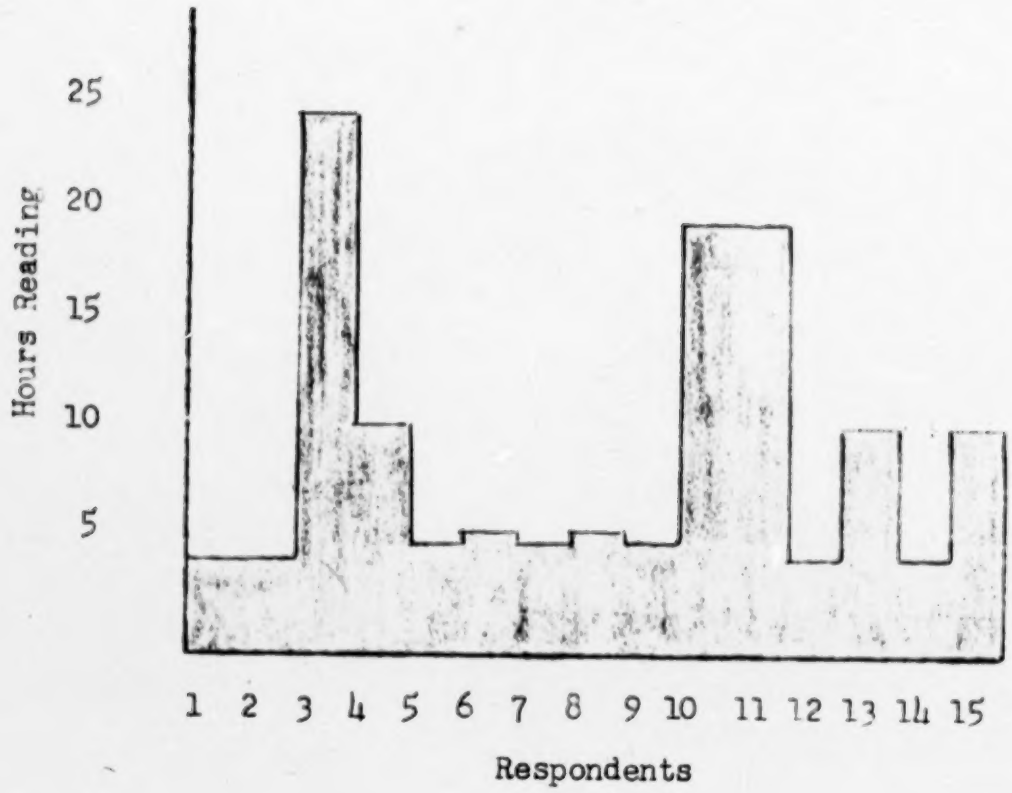

Figure 1.—Estimated Hours Spent Reading Each Week by District Supervisors.

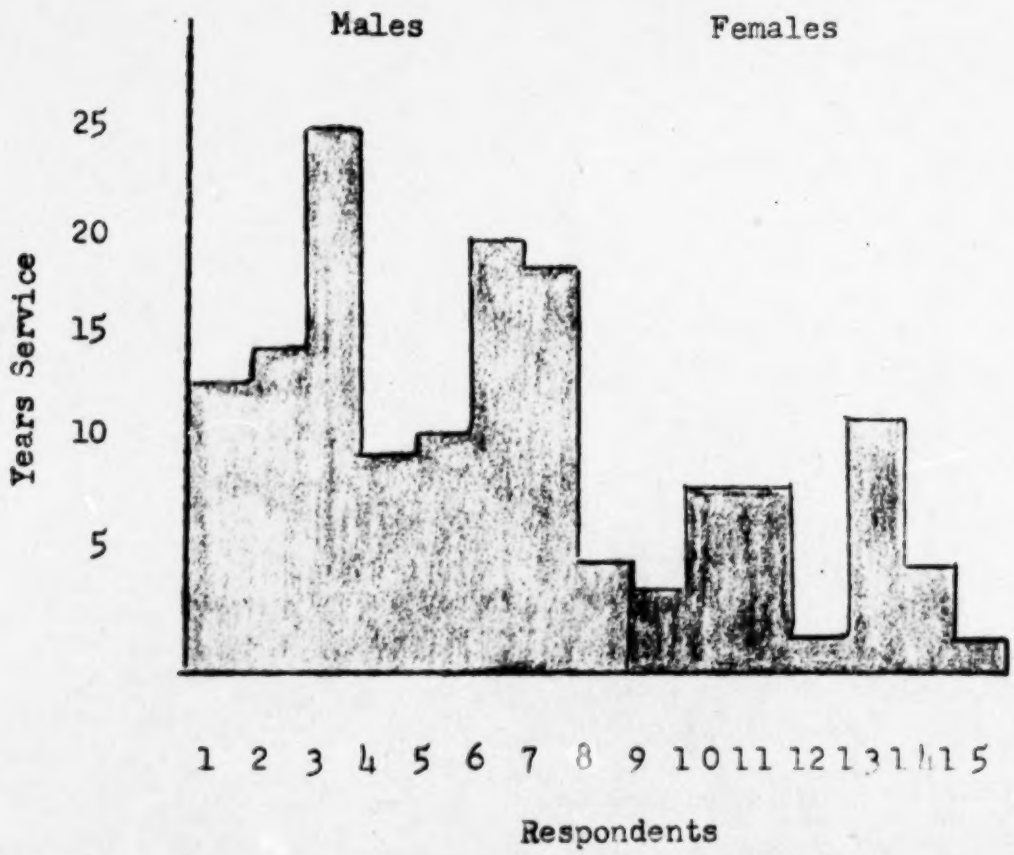

Figure 2.—Comparison by Sex of Years Service As A District Supervisor

Seven additional professional periodicals were read by four or more of the 15 respondents. These periodicals are listed in Table 4.

Table 1 shows a comparison of the reading habits of Journal of Cooperative Extension, Extension Service Review, and National 4-H Club News. The data tends to indicate that the reading habits of the staff are about the same for the Journal and Review; however, with 4-H News the tendency of the staff was to scan it only. No respondents reported reading this publication completely. It is interesting to note the tendency of males to read the Journal more completely than females and the same tendency holds true for those with more than eight years as a supervisor. Figure 2 tends to explain this relationship as the median years service for male supervisors is 14.8 years as compared to 5.9 years for females. This same general trend in readership is shown in the comparison of the reading habits of the supervisors for the Extension Service Review even though the spread is not as great. With the National 4-H Club News, however, none of the supervisors read it completely and almost 80 per cent only scan it. There was no significant difference in the readership of this publication by sex or by years of experience.

Reasons for Reading a Particular Publication

Table 2 is a comparison of the reasons for reading the Journal of Cooperative Extension, Extension Service Review, and National 4-H Club News. The overall tendency of the supervisors is to read for professional improvement as it relates to the Journal and Review. With the 4-H News, the general tendency is to read for curiosity. It is interesting to observe the tendency once again that a higher percentage of the male supervisors and those with eight or more years of service read the Journal and Review for professional improvement. The data in this table was based on answers to the following four questions:

> Which of the following four statements best describes your reason for reading these publications?
>
> 1. To pick up ideas for supervision.
> 2. To pick up ideas for use in discussion groups or speeches.
> 3. To pick up ideas to pass along to county staff.
> 4. Intellectual curiosity.

The data collected was collapsed with the first two categories being listed as professional improvement and the last two categories were listed as intellectual curiosity. This seemed to be a natural division generally occurring during the interview.

Table 3 gives an evaluation of the degree of usefulness of the Journal of Cooperative Extension, Extension Service Review, and

Table 1. A Comparison of The Reading Habits of Selected Publications by Supervisors of The N. C. Agricultural Extension Service

	SELECTED PUBLICATIONS								
	Journal of Cooperative Extension			Extension Service Review			National 4-H Club News		
Sex	N	Completely	Selectively	N	Completely	Selectively	N	Selectively	Scanned
Male	6	83%	17%	8	62%	38%	7	14%	86%
Female	6	17%	83%	7	43%	57%	7	29%	71%
All Respondents	12	50%	50%	15	53%	47%	14	21%	79%
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Tenure									
8 Years or Less	5	0%	100%	7	57%	43%	7	29%	71%
More Than 8 Years	7	86%	14%	8	87%	13%	7	14%	86%
All Respondents	12	50%	50%	15	53%	47%	14	21%	79%

Table 2. A Comparison of The Reasons For Reading Selected Publications by Supervisors of The N. C. Agricultural Extension Service

	SELECTED PUBLICATIONS								
	Journal of Cooperative Extension			Extension Service Review			National 4-H Club News		
Sex	N	Improvement	Curiosity	N	Improvement	Curiosity	N	Improvement	Curiosity
Male	6	67%	33%	8	88%	12%	7	57%	43%
Female	6	67%	33%	7	43%	57%	7	14%	86%
All Respondents	12	67%	33%	15	67%	33%	14	36%	64%
Tenure									
8 Years or Less	5	60%	40%	7	43%	57%	7	29%	71%
More Than 8 Years	7	71%	29%	8	87%	13%	7	43%	57%
All Respondents	12	67%	33%	15	67%	33%	14	36%	64%

Table 3. An Evaluation of The Usefulness of Selected Publications by Supervisors of The N. C. Agricultural Extension Service

	SELECTED PUBLICATIONS								
	Journal of Cooperative Extension			Extension Service Review			National 4-H Club News		
Sex	N	Very	Moderately	N	Very	Moderately	N	Moderately	Slightly
Male	6	100%	0%	8	50%	50%	7	57%	43%
Female	6	50%	50%	7	71%	29%	7	43%	57%
All Respondents	12	75%	25%	15	60%	40%	14	50%	50%
Tenure									
8 Years or Less	5	60%	40%	7	86%	14%	7	57%	43%
More Than 8 Years	7	86%	14%	8	38%	62%	7	43%	57%
All Respondents	12	75%	25%	15	60%	40%	14	50%	50%

National 4-H Club News by the extension supervisors. The data shows a trend towards a higher rating of usefulness for the Journal as compared to the Review. Here again we see a tendency for the male supervisors and the supervisors with more than eight years of experience to rate the Journal as being very useful in their work as a supervisor. None of the supervisors rated the 4-H News as being very useful and the tendency was to rate it as being only slightly to moderately useful to them as a supervisor. In collecting the data regarding an evaluation of these three publications, the question was asked:

> Which of the following statements best describes your evaluation of this publication in your work as a supervisor?
>
> 1. Very useful.
> 2. Moderately useful.
> 3. Slightly useful.
> 4. Of little use.
> 5. Of no use.

All of the answers fell within the first choices; therefore, the fifth response category was dropped. The data was collapsed to two categories as it related to the Journal and the Review--very useful and moderately useful. With the 4-H News, no respondents rated it very useful so the data was collasped to two categories--moderately useful and slightly useful.

Table 4. A Comparison of The Reading Habits and Evaluation of Selected Publications by Supervisors of The N. C. Agricultural Extension Service

Selected Publications	Number	Reading Habits		Reasons for Reading		Evaluation of Usefulness	
		Selectively	Scanned	Improvement	Curiosity	Moderately	Slightly
Journal of Home Economics	7	14%	86%	14%	86%	86%	14%
What's New in Home Economics	6	17%	83%	17%	83%	50%	50%
USDA Marketing	7	29%	71%	14%	86%	43%	57%
USDA Research	6	33%	67%	0%	100%	50%	50%
Adult Education	4	100%	0%	75%	25%	75%	25%
Adult Leadership	6	50%	50%	73%	17%	83%	17%
Forecast	4	25%	75%	25%	75%	50%	50%

Table 4 shows a comparison of the reading habits, reasons for reading, and an evaluation of several other selected professional publications. It is interesting to observe the general tendency that when the supervisors tend to read publications selectively, they tend to read for professional improvement and evaluate them as being moderately useful in their work as a supervisor. This tendency generally holds true for Adult Education and Adult Leadership. The tendency is to scan the other publications simply as a matter of intellectual curiosity and evaluate them as only slightly to moderately useful in their work as a supervisor.

Summary

The most typical district supervisor of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service has a B.S. degree plus graduate work but less than an M.S. degree. He has 10 years experience as a district supervisor, has served 12 years at the county level, and has about 25 years overall work experience. The supervisor spends approximately 9 hours per week reading beyond the daily newspaper and reads principally for professional improvement. On the average, he receives 9 professional publications and 4 popular publications each month.

A comparison of the reading habits, reasons for reading, and evaluation of information in certain selected publications shows that generally the older the supervisor is in years of service the more completely he reads professional publications, the higher he rates them as a means of professional improvement, and the higher he rates them in usefulness to him in his role as a supervisor.

Overall the staff of extension supervisors tends to rank the Journal of Cooperative Extension and the Extension Service Review as being the professional publications most completely read and read mostly for professional improvement. The data tended to indicate a difference in these two publications regarding usefulness to them in their work as a supervisor. The Journal was rated by a higher percentage of the staff as being very useful as compared to moderately useful for the Review.

The National 4-H Club News was used in the overall comparison to study the response to a specialized publication. The supervisors' tendency was to scan this publication, read it for intellectual curiosity, and rate it as being only slightly to moderately useful in their work as a supervisor.

The other professional publications studied followed generally the pattern established in reading and evaluating the National 4-H Club News with some few exceptions. Two of these are the Journal of

Adult Education and Adult Leadership. A larger percentage read these more selectively for professional improvement and rated them as being moderately useful in their role as a district supervisor. The remaining publications tended to generally follow the same pattern of being read by scanning, read for intellectual curiority, and rated as being only slightly to moderately useful in their work as a district extension supervisor.

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